



Issues behind the Oxford Fund

Isaiah Berlin Online aims to post, in the fullness of time, PDFs of all Berlin's uncollected and unpublished work, including lectures, interviews and broadcasts, so that it is conveniently readable and searchable online. The present PDF is part of this series.

The PDF is posted by the Isaiah Berlin Legacy Fellow at Wolfson College, with the support of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust.

All enquiries, including those concerning rights, should be directed to the Legacy Fellow at berlin@wolfson.ox.ac.uk

Issues behind the Oxford Fund

The Times, 7 July 1967, 9



*Anthony Crosland, Secretary of State for Education and Science,
22 January 1965 to 29 August 1967*

ISSUES BEHIND THE OXFORD FUND

TO THE EDITOR, *THE TIMES*

5 July 1967

Oxford University

From the Provost of the Queen's College, Oxford, and others

Sir, – As a few of the first hundred signatories who have launched the Oxford University Independence Fund, may we state the issues which we believe to be at stake? They are two.

First, there is the question of substance. This crisis has arisen because the Secretary of State for Education and Science has decided to reduce the public money granted to British Universities. He has done so on the assumption that these universities would, at his bidding, discriminate against overseas students by raising their fees very considerably, while keeping those of British students pegged at their present level. We agree that the level of university fees is a matter for debate, but we believe that discrimination in education is not only, in the long run, inexpedient but also wrong in principle.

Secondly, there is the question of method. All questions of the grant of public money to the universities have hitherto been discussed with the University Grants Committee, which exists for that purpose. There is also a Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals. These bodies were both aware of the problem of fees and had, indeed, considered equitable proposals to deal with it. But the Secretary of State has not troubled to notice these proposals. He has ignored the machinery of negotiation. He has not consulted the universities, or effectively consulted either the University Grants Committee or the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals. He has imposed his decision directly on the universities.

We doubt whether there is a single person in any university who approves of this action by the Secretary of State. The very language in which the spokesman of the Hebdomadal Council recommended the Congregation of Oxford University to accept the Minister's decision was a withering indictment of it. He admitted that the measure itself was wrong in principle, that its consequences would be damaging, and that the manner of its imposition might be 'an omen, and a very ill omen', of 'bureaucratic despotism' to come.

ISSUES BEHIND THE OXFORD FUND

Nevertheless, he urged us to accept it, and make the best that we can of it, as an administrative necessity.

The Congregation of Oxford refused to accept this reasoning. We believe that when a ministerial diktat is wrong in principle, our duty is to deal with the situation as we think right, and that if our independence is threatened for the future, we must look at it now. The price to be paid may be heavy, but there is no point in deceiving ourselves. We must act now.

Yours faithfully,

FLOREY

FRANKS

ISAIAH BERLIN

JOHN MAUD

JANET VAUGHAN

MAX BELOFF

H. L. A. HART

GEORGE BENNETT

R. H. C. DAVIS

H. R. TREVOR ROPER

© the authors 1967

Posted in Isaiah Berlin Online 13 January 2023